

They Say It's Your Birthday

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They Say It's Your Birthday

by [yrfndfrnkly](#)

Summary

Rolanda wakes Minerva on her 63rd birthday and promises rest, relaxation, and rambunctious. How can Minerva say no to a night out on the town getting tattooed, listening to ELO, and fighting the patriarchy?

Notes

Dear rose-grangerweasleyisbae, I am so thrilled that I got to create this piece. I truly hope that you enjoy it. When I saw your likes and wants some amusing scenarios began to play out in my brain. I'm not sure if it's what you had in mind, but I sure hope you enjoy it.

A massive, colossal, and gigantic thank you to my wonderful beta reader, who laughed along with me, encouraged me, and made this readable. You are solid gold.

Huge thanks also to the mods for running this wonderful fest!

I do not own Harry Potter in any way shape or form. I'm definitely not making any money from this for-fun fanwork.

“*Expelliarmus!*” Minerva deftly catches the wand sailing through the air towards her.

“Give that back, you old baggage!” screams the oaf who just lost his wand.

Minerva ignores him, instead looking around the field. It’s dark out—even darker now than when they’d arrived. The lanterns that previously hung about the pen, illuminating the grounds, have fallen to the ground. It’s been a wettish autumn so far, and Minerva doesn’t think the grass is dry enough to catch, but she sets to putting the lanterns out with targeted *Aguamenti* anyway. The hippogriffs have landed, and, free from their pens and from their riders, are on the rampage. On top of it all, incongruously jolly notes—piano and guitar and rowdy percussion all playing together—sound from the loudspeakers. *Hey you with the pretty face, welcome to the human race*

Minerva’s eyes find Rolanda a few yards away. She’s sitting on some lummoxy’s back, holding one of his arms behind him and using her other hand to plough his face into the grass repeatedly in time with Electric Light Orchestra.

Trusting Rolanda can take care of herself for another moment or two, Minerva casts another wandless and wordless *Protego*, and an invisible shield takes form around her, easily deflecting her disarmed opponent, who seems to have decided that, in the absence of his wand, the next best thing is to charge at Minerva like one of the indignant hippogriffs.

“Whaaaa?” he cries in confusion as he bounces backwards into the brawl.

Minerva tosses his wand onto the ground and looks to the sky for deliverance from this sorry scene as Jeff Lynne’s synthesised voice calls *Mr Blue Sky!* into the night. Minerva shakes her head and is pleased to note she feels no wayward hair around her face—her industrial strength Hair Holding Charm is doing its job. She lets out a dry, exasperated laugh before heading over to extract Rolanda and get them the hell out of here.

Her birthday had started out with such promise.

*

Minerva wakes on the 4th of October, 1998, to the sound of Rolanda calling, “*They say it’s your birthday!*”

“Rolanda, if I look at the clock and find it’s before 8am, I swear—“

“Would I do that?” Rolanda asks, flopping down on top of the rose-patterned bedspread next to Minerva with a bottle of scotch in her left hand and her wand in her right, Levitating over a covered breakfast tray.

“I seem to recall you waking me at 4:30 in the morning ‘to celebrate’ last time the Harpies won the league.”

Rolanda tries to wave her hand dismissively, but the gesture is hampered by the bottle she’s still clutching.

“This is different. It’s *your* birthday and it’s a Sunday. It’s also three-quarters past 8, thank you very much. And—“ Rolanda lengthens the ‘a’ as she grabs the silver lid on the foldy table that rests over Minerva’s prone form, “—I brought breakfast.”

“Wise woman,” Minerva acknowledges.

Rolanda whips the lid off of the tray with a flourish to reveal a cake, two forks, and two empty tumblers.

“Ah yes, that breakfast of champions: cake and whisky,” Minerva remarks. She’s exhausted, but she hopes the sarcasm makes it through.

Rolanda pulls the cork out of the bottle with her teeth and pours two drams. Meanwhile, Minerva shimmies her way into a sitting position, back against the headboard and legs under the tray. Rolanda hands her one tumbler before snatching the other for herself and chinking it against Minerva’s crystal glass.

“I am 63 years old,” Minerva announces, before taking a sip.

“*We’re gonna have a good time!*” Rolanda sings.

“How about a bog standard time?” Minerva says through a yawn.

“Where’s your birthday spirit, Min? To another 63 years!” Rolanda toasts, clipping Minerva’s tumbler with her own once more before tossing back the rest of her drink and setting her empty glass down on the tray, exchanging it for a fork, which she sticks into the cake, offering the forkful to Minerva.

“Not if I keep having liquor and pudding for breakfast,” Minerva remarks, closing her mouth around the fork and chewing the bite of cake.

“I know you can’t resist Hundreds and Thousands,” Rolanda says, grabbing another forkful from near the top, where the cake is thick with soft, buttery, white frosting covered in rainbow-coloured Hundreds and Thousands.

Minerva shrugs as she eats the frosting and takes the fork from Rolanda to begin feeding herself. It’s true enough—they remind her of her birthdays as a kid. Her father was an excellent baker, and favoured Muggle techniques in the kitchen—‘Magic ruins the rise’—he’d say. He was always liberal with the Hundreds and Thousands on her birthday cakes.

Minerva takes a few more bites of cake before the sweetness starts to make her mouth tingle. She washes it down with another sip of whisky, then turns to Rolanda and kisses her on the mouth. “Thank you, Ro. This was sweet.”

“What do you mean, ‘was’? It’s not every day you turn sixty-three. Everyone knows that’s an auspicious year,” Rolanda says philosophically.

“Is it, now?”

“Everyone knows 63 is the *take a cha-cha-cha-chance, birthday.*”

Minerva smiles, chuckling in spite of herself. Rolanda's always been up for a good time, and though Minerva herself is more buttoned-up, if she's honest she loves the way Rolanda can coax out her fun side, her cheeky side, her spirit of adventure.

"I've got a full day planned for us, Minerva McGonagall."

*

Wooed though she is by Rolanda's vivaciousness, Minerva knows what her schedule looks like for the upcoming week. Practical minded, she tries to argue that she needs to prepare for back-to-back meetings with Kingsley and the school governors tomorrow, that she needs the day to finish marking her N.E.W.T. students' papers, that *Transfiguration Today* has asked her to review an article, and that, really, if she is going to take a day off, she'd rather use it to catch up on all the sleep she's missed in the months since she became Headmistress, head of the Hogwarts Reconstruction Task Force, and Special Rehabilitation Liaison to the Ministry (or, not to put too fine a point on it, the sleep she's missed since that godforsaken goblet spat out Harry's name), but after a few minutes she gives it up as a bad job. Rolanda holds firm. They've been together nearly twenty years, but Minerva never tires of seeing Rolanda's no-nonsense stance directed towards *fun*. Minerva tries not to think too hard about how long it's been since she had any fun, and sighs.

"Oh ho! None of that on your birthday. We're going to have a good time, remember?" Rolanda chides playfully. "It's about time you had some good fun." A grimace flashes across Rolanda's face, but she banishes it quickly. "Anyway, what kind of monster to you take me for? It's just about 9, which means we have 13 more hours to celebrate the wonder of your existence. So here's the plan: stay in bed until about 4pm, splitting our time between napping, drinking, and shagging, as you prefer, and then we'll start to get a move on to make the most of the evening. What do you say?" Rolanda's tone is enthusiastic, but there's a real question there. Resistance in the face of Hufflepuff birthday enthusiasm might be futile, but Minerva knows Rolanda well enough to know that if she says no, Rolanda will back off. Sure, Rolanda will probably stay in bed herself drinking and napping and, well... while Minerva carries on with her laundry list of responsibilities. But Rolanda knows her well enough to be just as aware as Minerva is—probably more—how starved she is for a day off, some levity, a bit of fun.

Minerva smiles. "What happens at four?" she asks.

"It's important to live in the now, Min," Rolanda dodges before spelling away the tray and climbing onto Minerva, straddling her lap.

"The now *is* quite appealing," Minerva admits, shimmying back down into the bed and pulling Rolanda in for a kiss.

*

By the time they leave their chambers, it's 5 o'clock and Minerva is tipsy, better rested, and, thanks to Rolanda's facility in the boudoir, less highly strung than she's been in about four years. Through Sunday-quiet corridors, Rolanda and Minerva head to the Great Hall for supper. Minerva receives quiet but merry "Happy Birthdays!" from her colleagues, who

know better than to let the students find out any more personal information about the staff than is strictly necessary.

After supper, Pomona invites Minerva and Rolanda back to her verdant chambers for drinks, along with Septima, Filius, Poppy, and Rubeus. In Pomona's quarters, everyone toasts Minerva's good health with some sherry, except Rolanda, who's switched to sparkling water since the afternoon, which makes Minerva slightly nervous. It's a pleasant time, and when Minerva and Rolanda take their leave a couple of hours later, Minerva has to admit this birthday's been a hell of a lot better than her planned day of reviewing an article that 'explores the difficulties inherent in aquatic animagus forms,' going over notes from her last meeting with Kingsley, and grading a stack of papers by students who don't yet appreciate the practical importance of Transfiguration to their future magical careers.

They thank Pomona for hosting and head back to their own chambers.

"This has been lovely, Ro," Minerva says, planting a kiss of thanks on Rolanda's cheek. "You're right; a day off is just what I—"

"I'm going to stop you at, 'you're right,'" Rolanda says dryly. "And I would ask you to remember that you admitted as much and not argue when I tell you to put on something Muggle-friendly and grab whatever you need for a night out."

"But—"

Rolanda silences any potential protestations with a kiss. "Remember," she says, affecting a Scottish accent, "you're right, Rolanda."

*

A quick change, a walk to Hogsmeade, and an Apparition later (Rolanda's soberness making all the more sense), Minerva finds herself on a dodgy looking street in—

"Inverness?"

"A fine night out, is Inverness," Rolanda answers.

Shabby-looking pubs dot each side of the street, with takeaway restaurants and off-licenses between them, along with the neon signs of tattoo parlours and, up ahead—

"The Magic Muff?" Minerva reads, incredulous.

"We've had rest and relaxation, now time for some rambunctious," Rolanda instructs, taking Minerva's arm and pulling her ahead.

"Didn't we decide back in the 70s that this kind of thing is patriarchal and demeaning?"

"This place is different! It's magical and feminist! It'll be fun," Rolanda says, pushing open the door and disappearing inside.

"But I can't feel any wards," Minerva says suspiciously as she follows in Rolanda's wake.

They barely make it beyond the bouncer and the fellow collecting cash and stamping people's hands. Inside, they both lay eyes on the woman on stage—Minerva estimates she's in her mid-twenties, wearing a 10 gallon hat, snakeskin boots, and a hip-holster with two fake Muggle pistols—riding a stick-horse while lecherous men stuff banknotes into her leather g-string.

"Nope." Minerva says, and turns around.

"But..." Back on the street, Rolanda sounds confused. "It's called the Magic Muff! This place isn't owned by witches!" she hisses to Minerva in an angry whisper. "And that woman definitely didn't have a muff! She didn't have any public hair—this is false advertising!" Rolanda gestures aggressively towards the pink neon sign with one thumb.

A couple of lads across the street look Minerva and Rolanda up and down, but years of teaching at a boarding school have furnished both of them with the ability to ignore youths for England (and Scotland, respectively).

"Are you telling me you decided this place was magical and feminist based on the name?" Minerva asks in an undertone. "I had to restrain myself from jumping onto the stage and covering that woman in my coat like Sirius Black that time we found him and Lupin in the Astronomy tower," Minerva reflects. "*The Astronomy Tower*," she snorts. "Honestly, do students have no imagination?"

"You know they don't," Rolanda affirms offhandedly. "Maybe we could try a male strip club?" she suggests, clearly dejected by the profoundly un-fun, un-magical, and un-feminist aspects of the Magic Muff.

"If we're amused there and horrified here, isn't that a bit misandrist?"

"I'm not sure. But it's definitely a double standard," Rolanda concedes, shoulders slumping.

"I don't want to see any penises," Minerva adds. "I haven't seen one since I lived at home with my brothers and I don't want to break a streak more than 40 years strong." Indeed, Minerva thinks the record particularly impressive considering she has spent most of her adult life, not only working in a boarding school, but as Head of Gryffindor House therein.

"Oi!" calls one of the lads from across the street, "I'll break your streak, sweetheart." He grabs his crotch suggestively, and Minerva and Rolanda demonstrate once more perfect scores in Ignoring the Asinine.

"Fair point." Rolanda's posture straightens again, as though Minerva's impressive penis-avoidance record has energised her. "No strip clubs for us." She smacks her hands together. "On to greater and less upsetting adventures. Though—" she pauses, "I would like to know if the lads they have dancing are also pubeless."

"Perhaps Pomona will be game for a fact-finding mission sometime." Minerva holds out her elbow.

“Questions for a later date.” Rolanda takes Minerva’s arm. “Right now we’ve got a slightly sidetracked birthday to re-route.”

Together, they start in one direction—a random direction, Minerva thinks—up the street. The lads behind them call out. Minerva would have left them without a word, but as they march upwards under the intermittent street lamps, Rolanda calls back over her shoulder. “By the way, lads, *she’d* break *you*.”

*

“Well,” says Rolanda, “the first part of the evening is over earlier than I’d planned. But onward and upward, like a well-serviced broom.”

Minerva smiles and looks at Rolanda out of the side of her eye. Rolanda does, indeed, use that phrase a lot—to her first years, to her colleagues. It seems to encompass Rolanda’s approach to life: one thing at a time, never demanding anything from any situation, but always entering it with high spirits.

“What’s next, then?”

Rolanda nods her head to an alley a short way ahead. When they reach it, Rolanda pulls Minerva into it.

“Are you up to Side-Along?” Rolanda asks.

Minerva thinks briefly that she hasn’t had anything to drink since they left Pomona’s and she could Apparate herself, thank you very much. She scolds herself with a reminder of how many lectures she’s given sixth and seventh years about arriving alive.

“I suppose there’s no point asking what our next stop is?”

“None,” Rolanda affirms, gripping Minerva’s arm a little tighter with her hand.

*

“Knockturn Alley?” Minerva asks wryly.

“No need for that tone. It’s not all shrunken heads and poisons, as you know damn well.”

“Well, that’s me told.” Minerva gestures for Rolanda to lead on.

They walk through the alley, past Fledermaus and Tanner Bats & Skins, Noggin and Bonce, and the betting shop, up to—

“Markus Scarrs Indelible Tattoos,” Minerva reads aloud from the wooden sign.

“I thought I Banished that tone?” Rolanda jokes.

“I must be confused,” Minerva parries. “I thought it was *my* birthday.”

“It is! And your penultimate present is me inking your ungrateful name into my skin forever.”

“What?” Minerva splutters, taken aback.

“What’s this? Have I flapped the unflappable Minerva McGonagall?”

“I just think you might spare a moment’s thought before you permanently decorate your body. What if the tattoo artist is a baby-eater with face tattoos? What if it looks bad? What will it even say?”

Rolanda pushes open the door to the parlour and waves Minerva in before her. “I’m waffling between Minerva and Minnie. What do you prefer?”

“Definitely Minerva,” calls a voice from behind them. A wizard of perhaps forty walks out from behind a beaded curtain to take his place behind a highly polished wooden desk. He’s wearing long sleeves and trousers, and aside from a small mark of ink near his thumb joint, Minerva can’t spot any tattoos; despite her concerns, he has no facial indications of baby-eating. In fact, the whole place, from ceiling to floor, from the brass lanterns and ornaments to the wood surfaces, from the spotless panes of glass that frame the art on the walls—of what, Minerva presumes, must be this man’s work—to the artist himself, looks neat as a pin, warm, and positively welcoming.

“Rolanda?” he asks, shaking Rolanda’s hand. “I didn’t look for you for another hour.”

“Sorry about that; plans changed slightly.”

“And this must be Minerva.” He puts a hand out to Minerva, who shakes it. The chap is the opposite of off-putting, the antithesis of the stereotypical Knockturn Alley reprobate.

“And you are?”

“Pardon me, madam—Minerva?” he asks, cautiously, looking for permission.

Minerva nods obligingly.

“Markus: tattoo artist and disreputable shop owner, at your service,” he introduces himself teasingly.

“We can’t help our neighbours,” Rolanda says jovially, joining in.

“Was Markus Skarr the best *nom de plume* you could think of?” Minerva has to know.

He laughs, a picture of good humour. “It suits the vibe of the Alley, you know? I mean, the rent is affordable this part of town, and I do a good business around here—teenagers think it’s edgy to come to Knockturn and get tattooed, I suppose.” He laughs again. “Anyway, you can call me Euge—short for Eugene.” Eugene smiles and brings his hands together with an excited rub. “Now then, you’re not quite settled on Minnie versus Minerva? I’d favour Minerva off hand—‘a’s always give a nice flourishing ending to a text tattoo if you choose the right script. But I can mock up both for you to compare the look. Did you want any embellishments?”

“Like what?” Minerva asks.

“Oh, interested now, are you?” Rolanda pipes up.

Minerva is, actually. This shop, with its warm, polished aesthetic, with its kind, cheeky shopkeeper, is like a diamond in the rough. And Minerva has always had a soft spot for such places, such people. Euge reminds her of a mish-mash of her favourite students: the independent ones, the bright ones, the funny ones, the ones with a well-mastered streak of rebelliousness in them, the ones who, despite such traits, have an effortless facility with people. Minerva feels her heart smiling and grimacing in equal measure, but brings herself back to the conversation. This is absolutely not the place to get melancholy about the poor survival rate of her students over the last two decades.

“Yes,” Minerva finally answers in spite of the sound of her own voice lecturing inside her head about how getting a “deep” and “meaningful” tattoo ranks amongst the top five pinnacle clichés.

“Here, I can show you.” Euge walks out from behind the desk and over to one of the frame-covered walls.

He points to bits of his work here and there; mostly it’s images, things—animals, pin-ups, anchors—all the clichés, but with magical twists. The anchors’ chains sway just so in the non-existent currents, the pin-ups blush coyly, the dogs bare their teeth and the birds quiver, ruffling their feathers. They are, undoubtedly, fantastic. They are clichés, yet they are pieces of art. Minerva watches Euge point out a heart with an arrow through it to Rolanda, mentioning they could change “mother” to “Minerva.” Minerva looks at his bright smile, his clear passion for his work and the artistry with which he carries it out, his cheeky streak... Minerva cannot help but be reminded of James and Sirius, of Fred and George Weasley—her best and worst students, only one of them still living. She tries again to push away the melancholy as she thinks of these youngsters, so vivacious, so adventurous, so spirited—not unlike Rolanda. But snuffed out.

“You’re not getting that pirate tattoo,” Minerva says, following the lead of her erstwhile, cheeky charges and speaking what’s on her mind without thinking.

“Oh?” Rolanda sounds haughty and turns away from the wall, from Euge, towards Minerva, shoulders back—clearly ready to have it out.

“I misspoke,” Minerva admits. “Of course, you are at liberty to have any tattoo you want. You know I like your crossed broom and beater’s bat.” Where many women would blush, Rolanda looks smug. Minerva loves her for it. “And in any case, it’s not for me to decide how you wear your body. What I meant was—” She pauses to clear her throat. Minerva can’t help it if she has a natural aptitude for dramatic oration. “It’s my birthday, and *I* want a tattoo.”

“Pull the other one,” says Rolanda.

Euge just smiles, as though he sees such scenes unfold a dozen times a week.

“What kind of tattoo do you want? Please know if you get a lion I’ll never let it go.”

Minerva scoffs and points to a large, black, leather portfolio on the desk. “There’s more of your work in here? More selections?” Minerva asks.

Euge nods. “Yes, and I have another portfolio in the back I can grab. It’s older work, less polished than what’s in here—” he taps the portfolio, “—and on the walls.”

“You two carry on,” Minerva instructs. “I’ll take a look.”

Euge hands them both consent forms, asking them to sign to swear they are of sound and sober mind. Rolanda looks at Minerva and winks. Close enough, Minerva thinks.

*

After twenty or so minutes, Rolanda walks over to Minerva, who’s sat in a comfortable upholstered chair near the door. Rolanda grabs a handful of her right pant leg and tugs it up, revealing a stencil on her ankle that reads, “Minerva” in an embellished but completely legible script. It’s simple, plain, but even as a stencil, elegant.

“I’m relieved you decided against the pirate heart,” Minerva observes good-naturedly. “I don’t fancy reflecting on the mother issues that might suggest.”

“I like ‘Minerva’ as is,” Rolanda says, so, so genuinely. And if Minerva were turning 16 instead of 63, she’s sure she’d blush at the honeyed tones.

After a few more moments in which Minerva and Rolanda both consider the look of the stencil in a mirror to one side of the desk, Euge joins them.

“That job won’t take long.” He jerks his head towards Rolanda. “Did anything catch your eye?” The question is for Minerva.

“I picked something, yes,” Minerva answers, hedging. Rolanda snorts as though in despair of Minerva’s weak attempt at a joke.

“What’ll it be?” He presses.

Minerva opens the portfolio resting on her lap. With a wordless spell, the pages begin to flick and finally stop on the one she marked. “I’ll have this,” she says, gesturing to one of the images.

Euge chuckles warmly, and Rolanda walks over, her own tattoo apparently forgotten for the moment. She barks out a laugh, then says, “No offence, lad,” to Euge.

“None taken. Are you sure that’s what you want? This is your first tattoo, right? Sometimes it’s good to sit with these things a bit, not to be too impulsive—”

Minerva cuts him off, because the entire point of getting this tattoo is to be impulsive, to remember those whose adventuring was cut short. “This one,” she affirms.

“Alright,” Euge says, while Rolanda casts doubtful looks at Minerva.

Euge turns his attention back to Rolanda, directing her to take a seat on a long, reclining chair next to the work station where he's already prepared his inks.

"If you're ready, Rolanda, I'm going to get the needle going without ink for just second to get you used to the feeling, okay?"

"Fire away, lad." And he does.

After about 15 minutes of Rolanda sitting silently with a clenched jaw and Euge pausing every so often to check on her, Rolanda has a new tattoo. Though the ink is black, the irritated skin has given it a strange, creepy hue. Even still, Minerva can appreciate Euge's work. Unlike the stencil, this 'Minerva' has a sort of glimmer, a luster, that is understated, but clearly demarcates it from a Muggle tattoo.

"Have you always had a knack for Charms?" Minerva asks while Euge daubs away the final flecks of blood from Rolanda's ankle.

Euge looks pleased with himself at Minerva's compliment, reminding her again of some of her most beloved and irksome too-smart-by-half pupils. "Yes," he admits with apparent relish. "With magical tattoos, the art is done by magic, and you charm it at the end to get the ink moving in loops, like photographs, you know? But I always thought the effect looked so garish and hokey, so I learned how to tattoo the Muggle way, with the gun, and started experimenting with internal chanting, sort of weave the magic all through the process, if that makes sense. The tattoo itself is a traditional Muggle one, just with a tiny flair. I try to keep it subtle; ironically, I doubt a Muggle would even notice the magic."

"Likely not." Minerva's impressed. "The effect is certainly more refined than the magical tattoos I've seen."

Euge looks positively chuffed now. "Well, let's see what you think once yours is done."

He gets up to clear things away, sterilise the workspace, and mock up Minerva's stencil. Minerva takes Rolanda's hand and they walk together back to the mirror, where Rolanda takes in her new tattoo from different angles, looking pleased.

"Are you..." Minerva's not sure what new tattoo etiquette is, especially when the tattoo is of your own name. Rolanda already had the broom and bat by the time they got together—it was just another part of her to love. "...happy with it?" Minerva finishes after a beat.

Rolanda abandons looking at her tattoo to look Minerva in the eyes. "I love it," she says simply, and plants a peck on Minerva's lips.

"Now," Rolanda asks, voice once again no-nonsense. "Are you sure you'll love *yours*? Why don't you take a couple of weeks? Pick something that means something to you?"

"I already picked something that means something to me." Minerva sniffs primly. Working with children for more than half of her life has given her limited patience for being second guessed. She doesn't care if her tattoo is silly, ugly even—that's not the point.

“Something you picked out of a book in less than 20 minutes has deep meaning for you, does it?”

“Indeed it does, my dear. And for your information, I picked it in less than 20 seconds.” Minerva doesn’t want to get into a Feelings Thing here in Euge’s warm, friendly tattoo parlour. But picking something, anything—making a snap decision and running with it (something, mind, that can’t hurt anyone, at least no one but Minerva, and even then, only for a few minutes)—is the whole point, the whole meaning.

From behind the desk, Euge summons Minerva. Minerva kisses Rolanda again, this time on the cheek. “All’s well,” Minerva assures her as she walks once more past the desk to take her turn in the chair.

*

Minerva’s tattoo takes longer than Rolanda’s had. And it smarts something awful while the ink and the silent incantations are going in, but in under an hour they settle up, leaving Euge a massive tip and promises they wouldn’t dream of visiting another parlour should future tattoos take their fancy.

It’s well dark out by the time they’re back outside, on Knockturn Alley, Rolanda suppressing a grin and Minerva prodding at the sensitive skin on the underside of her bicep.

“Don’t pick at it,” Rolanda cautions. “You heard what Euge said. No picking or scratching. Only gentle washing and moisturising if you want it to heal nicely.”

“I’m not picking—it’s irritated.”

“Well don’t *touch* it then. ‘It’s irritated’—I ask you... How about a distraction, then?” Rolanda asks, as Minerva continues prodding, immune to her remonstrances.

“How about we go back to Hogwarts and sleep it off?”

“Be a sport, the night is young!”

“It’s gone 10 o’clock,” Minerva counters.

“But it’s your *Take a cha-cha-cha-chance birthday*.”

“I just got an impulse tattoo in Knockturn Alley, how many more chances do you want me to take?”

“I had one more stop planned, and it oughtn’t to take long. We’ll be home well before the witching hour.” Rolanda smiles coyly and offers Minerva her hand.

Minerva smirks and takes it.

“Where to then, Madam Hooch?”

“Well, you know what they say—“

“Getting tattooed past 50 is a cry for help?”

“Ageist,” Rolanda dismisses. “And no. I was going to say: *when in Rome*.”

Rolanda leads the way farther down the Alley. It may not be terribly late now, but more and more characters are emerging, talking in hushed voices with one another in doorways, or trying to catch the eyes of passersby—probably trying to suss out if she and Rolanda are promising patrons or undercover DMLE agents.

Before long, they pass through a creaking door into a shop much less warm and friendly, albeit more populated, than Euge’s. Though, it must be said, not much more populated. There are three counters off to one side, and no chairs, only high bar-like areas here and there where a smattering of patrons lean, listening to magical speakers positioned at intervals along the ceiling.

“Is this a betting parlour?” Minerva asks, genuinely surprised.

Rolanda dons a silly smile and nods. “I thought: what better way to cap off your birthday than to lose some Galleons on a hippogriff race.”

“This snatches the cracker. I don’t know what’s worse, throwing money away or peeping at women with no public hair.”

“Oh, you know it’s the latter, and anyway, I’m pretty sure both are topped by decorating your underarm with a—” Minerva puts her hand over Rolanda’s mouth in a good-natured and loving gesture to shut up.

“Come on,” Rolanda says once her mouth is free and clear again. “*You’ve* got nothing to lose. Let’s take a look at the next race and *I’ll* risk some money on the hippogriff with the stupidest name.”

When they get to the counter, the bookie tells them betting is closed for the current race, but there’s another starting when it ends. Rolanda asks for a roster of the hippogriffs and, list in hand, they head over to one of the bars to consult it.

“Lucky Bitch?” Rolanda reads.

“Creative,” Minerva remarks.

“Glasgow Gold. Pft, as if alliteration is clever.”

“Excuse me,” Minerva reprimands.

Rolanda waves a hand. “Oh, you know what I mean.”

“Sweet Aunt Mabel? Merciful Morgana, who names these things?”

“What’ll it be then?” Minerva asks. “Is Sweet Aunt Mabel stupid enough for you to lose a few Galleons on?”

“I think not.” Rolanda sounds satisfied. “Look here.” Rolanda points further down the list.

“Dutch Courage?” Minerva reads, unimpressed. “Bit obvious, isn’t it?”

“Such a superficial reading of the text,” Rolanda teases in her best impression of Minerva in research mode. She taps the paper again with a fingertip for emphasis. “*Number 63, Dutch Courage.*”

*

When the race ends, a solitary patron looks pleased and heads over the the counters to collect their winnings, while far more people look dejected, yet head over behind the winner to place further bets. In the absence of race commentary, some crooning music starts to play over the speakers.

“This is people’s idea of fun?” Minerva says quietly, not wanting to offend any of the people she’s judging. “People do this routinely,” she states, disbelieving.

“We don’t. We come. We judge. We lose. Then we head home where you can rest easy, at least until some idiot detention seeker decides to sneak a peek at the nude woodcuts in the restricted section, or to have a grope in the Astronomy Tower.”

“Why do they all go to the Astronomy Tower?” Minerva wonders aloud for the millionth time since being appointed to the Hogwarts staff.

“Young people are idiots.”

“Ageist,” Minerva responds with maximum cheek.

After the queues clear away from the counters, the music pauses for a moment while a *Sonorous* voice announces that they are now taking bets for the next race.

“Come on,” Rolanda says, pushing herself up from her lean and pulling Minerva back over to the bookies.

“We’ll put 63 Galleons on Dutch Courage, please,” Rolanda tells the bookie at the second counter.

“63 on 63, right you are, madam,” he responds without looking up. Rolanda fills in a Gringotts bank draft, handing it over in exchange for a small ticket.

“Don’t lose that, mind, or you can’t collect your winnings, should you get lucky.”

“Ta,” Rolanda says.

“Happy now you’ve lost your money?” Minerva asks her.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Suit yourself.”

They resume their place, leaning at a bar. Without the noise of an announcer calling the race, it's quieter than before. A different voice, Minerva recognises it as one of the broadcasters from the WWN, introduces a song. The kind of music the WWN is inclined to play at half ten is fairly mellow, certainly compared to the voice of a man paid to infuse each syllable with aggressive enthusiasm. Another crooney song that Minerva recognises from her youth comes on and she cringes. "Do you think if we changed the station the bookies would notice?"

"Hm? Who knows. This scene too boring for you? You're a traitor to your generation," Rolanda joke-scolds.

"Ha!" Minerva's laugh is mirthless. "If 50s music wants my allegiance it'll have to cut out the romanticisation of domestic abuse and come up with a few tracks over two and a half minutes long."

Rolanda smiles. "I'd drink to that, if I had a drink."

"The 70s were so much better."

Rolanda closes her eyes for a moment and nods in nostalgic agreement. "Too bad about the 80s backlash, though."

"Still some good counter-culture in the 80s," Minerva admits. "4 Non Blondes, Indigo Girls."

"No argument there, but as decades go—"

"I know." Minerva nearly adds: who thought it could get worse? But, just like back at Euge's, she's determined to keep her sense of humour, her spirits up. It's the least she can do to be alive while, well, being alive. "Maybe it makes me a bad lesbian, casting my vote against the queer women of the 80s, but I can't give any decade top spot that doesn't have a heavy ELO showing."

Rolanda snorts, then looks contemplative for a moment. The music coming from the speaker suddenly changes. A moody string riff quickly shifts to the jaunty melody of Sweet Talking Woman.

"That's a fancy bit of magic." Minerva's impressed.

Rolanda ignores the compliment, does nothing to acknowledge she's tampered with the music. "The happiest band in the world," she says instead, the nostalgic twinkle in her eye reflecting the feeling in Minerva's chest. "If you could only listen to one ELO song for the rest of your life, what would it be? Strange Magic?" Rolanda waggles her eyebrows. "D'you reckon they were really Muggles?"

Before Minerva can answer either question, though, the ELO cuts away abruptly and the *Sonorused* voice returns over the loud speakers to call the next race.

Minerva can't quite make out what the announcer is saying—he's talking faster than a bloody auctioneer. With her ears listening out for 63, though, she catches that Rolanda's hippogriff is the last to leave the gates. "Good pick," she teases.

“Plenty of race left.”

And there is. For the first few furlongs it seems that Glasgow Gold has a good lead. The announcer slowly loses some of his earlier enthusiasm, forced as he is to look to the hippogriffs in the back to call places lost and gained, reminding the listeners every so often that Glasgow Gold is still yards ahead. After he announces the sixth furlong, though, his excitement grows. “Some of the slower griffs are hitting their stride now, folks. English Country Home is putting some distance between himself and Sweet Aunt Mabel, and Dutch Courage isn’t far behind!” Over the next two furlongs, Dutch Courage passes English Country Home and Sweet Aunt Mabel, taking up position behind Glasgow Gold and, the announcer calls, ever more breathlessly, eating away at the lead.

Despite herself, excitement begins to grow in Minerva. She doesn’t care one jot which hippogriff wins the race, but Rolanda is beside her, eyes wide, gripping the bar, and it stokes a flame inside Minerva, who takes Rolanda’s hand and grips it tightly as the announcer calls that the tenth and final furlong has begun.

“And it’s still Glasgow Gold in the lead, but the leader is flagging! Dutch Courage is known as a bad starter and a good finisher, and that’s exactly what we’re seeing here tonight! And yes—yes! Dutch Courage has caught Glasgow Gold. Both jockeys are going mad, getting every last ounce they can out of these griffs, but yes, they’ve less than half a lap left and now they’re neck and neck. I’m just not sure Glasgow Gold has the stamina to finish this race in the lead and—yes, that’s Dutch Courage taking the lead in the final quarter! Dutch Courage leading, leading. Glasgow Gold is trying to respond, but it’s no good. No good at all! Indeed, that’s English Country Home hot on Glasgow Gold, and Glasgow Gold may have to be satisfied with third place! We’re in the final seconds now and Dutch Courage is head and shoulders ahead of Glasgow Gold, who’s slipping further back and, yes! That’s it! Dutch Courage has it! That’s Dutch Courage with the win, folks, English Country Home in second, and Glasgow Gold in third after blowing it all in the first 7 furlongs.”

“Yes!” a voice calls out, and Minerva realises it’s hers when her bicep hurts. In her excitement, she’s lifted her and Rolanda’s arms into the air with a whoop, pulling her inflamed skin tight. She drops her arm and winces, but immediately regains her smile.

“Alright there?” Rolanda asks. When Minerva reassures her with a nod, Rolanda switches right back to celebrating. She waggles her eyebrows. “See, I told you we’d have a fun night!” Around the room, those who’ve lost cast them grudging looks.

“I believe you told me we’d *lose*.”

“Oh, it’s *we* now, is it?” Rolanda smirks. “Come on, then. Let’s go collect *our* winnings.”

Music comes once again over the speakers, Don’t Bring Me Down, this time. Minerva makes a mental note to ask Rolanda how she’s doing that when Rolanda’s in a less woman-of-mysterious-adventure mood. Rolanda swaggers up to counter 2, Minerva right behind her. Steps before the counter, the music cuts again suddenly and the announcer’s voice calls out, apropos of nothing: “HIPPOGRIFF DISQUALIFIED. That’s number 63, Dutch Courage, Disqualified.”

Minerva can't believe it. That can't be right. Next to her, all the wind seems to blow out of Rolanda's sails. A short ways from them, the bookie at counter 2 looks at them for the first time that night, an infuriatingly amused look on his face, as though denying someone their winnings is a rare treat.

Over the course of five very fast moving, very unsatisfying minutes, Minerva learns that there is no point arguing with a bookmaker. When she and Rolanda demand to know why their hippogriff was disqualified, he keeps feeding them the same line: he doesn't make the rules—those kinds of decisions come from the track.

Minerva is fuming as they leave. It's not the 63 galleons (or whatever the return would have been—Minerva never checked what the odds on Dutch Courage were) that's bothering her, it's the injustice of it.

"This is a shocking lack of transparency," she lectures as she holds the door open for Rolanda.

"I agree."

"We should lodge a complaint with the Department of Magical Games and Sports!"

"Could do," Rolanda agrees. "If you want to get fined for betting on an illegal hippogriff race."

"Argh!" Minerva calls into the night. She looks around at Knockturn Alley. "What on earth were we thinking coming here—"

"Ah, be fair. You loved griping about The Misogynist Muff, you had a right old time at Euge's, and you were happy as a salamander in a November bonfire back there when you thought we were winning."

"That's..." True, Minerva thinks. "Alright, fair enough. But this still isn't right."

"I agree," Rolanda says again, and smiles like she's possessed by a devil of mischief. "Want to put it right? It's not yet 11 o'clock. It's still your birthday. You're the boss." She offers Minerva her arm.

*

Minerva lands stable on ground that's got a good spring to it. She looks down, and though it's getting late, she can see they've landed on grass. They're in something like a field, and not far off she can see lanterns hanging around what looks like a large fence. People are shuffling around it and inside of it—

"You brought us to the track? How did you even know where it is?"

"We're not all too grand to drink in the Hogshead. A fine place to overhear a thing or two." Rolanda picks at a fingernail.

Minerva has been amused and lightly surprised throughout the night's birthday chance-taking, but Rolanda has always had high spirits and a keen sense of adventure. Paired with a takes-no-guff attitude and a steadfast manner, Minerva has always found it incredibly attractive. Rarely, though, has Rolanda ever shocked her.

"You said we should complain," Rolanda says simply. "Shall we head over there and find out what asshole disqualified Dutch Courage?"

Minerva doesn't particularly want to spend the end of her 63rd birthday arguing with lawbreakers, but, to be fair, she's already joined their ranks, and besides, she has an equally powerful compulsion not to let injustice slide. She wants to get to the bottom of this.

Casting a *Lumos* better to navigate bumps and holes in the field, Minerva leads the way over to the lights, fence, and people. On closer inspection, Minerva can see that the fence is a hippogriff enclosure, and not far behind it is a track. Some people are milling around the pen, discussing the last race, boasting about their hippogriffs.

Minerva approaches someone, a shady looking witch. "Who's in charge around here?" she asks, firmly but quietly, keen to avoid a scene if possible.

"What's it to you?" the witch replies rudely.

"I'd like to speak with them," Minerva says, giving nothing away.

"Not with DMLE are you? Nosing around?"

Minerva sighs inwardly. She can feel through the sheer force of familiarity Rolanda's eye roll next to her. "We are not with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. We have a question about one of the hippogriffs."

"Oh?" The woman's whole aspect changes. "Looking to buy, are you? That's my beast, over there, Sweet Aunt Mabel. No faster griff—"

"Pft." Rolanda can't seem to stop herself. "What would we want to buy that loser for?"

Minerva winces. They weren't likely to get anywhere before, and she's sure that insults will get them even further down the road to nowhere.

"Think you're la-dee-da, do you?" the witch asks.

"We're interested in Dutch Courage," Minerva tells her, hoping, if not to placate her, to find someone who can illuminate the situation.

"Well I nev—"

"Interested in Dutch Courage, eh?" comes a man's voice from behind them. Minerva turns and sees a short man in shirt sleeves, rolled up, with a pair of braces pulled off of his shoulders, jangling around his hips as he walks towards them in the dim light. She wonders why he doesn't just wear short sleeves and a belt.

“You own Dutch Courage?” Minerva asks. He seems fairly chipper for the owner of a disqualified race animal.

“Not me. I’m the jockey.” He gestures to himself, as though to emphasise his diminutive stature.

“Are you?” Rolanda’s voice is enthusiastically curious, and Minerva doesn’t need the Sight to tell their fact finding mission is in danger of being derailed by Rolanda’s love of all forms of flying. “How long have you been riding—”

“Is the owner here?” Minerva cuts her off, receiving a light elbow to the ribs from Rolanda.

“Mr Hurdicure?” the man asks. “Somewhere. He doesn’t miss a race. He’s in a right mood tonight, though. Hates losing.”

“You don’t?” Rolanda asks.

“You win some, you lose some, don’t you?”

“Exactly right.” Rolanda nods approvingly, clapping him on the arm. And Minerva can tell that it’s only a matter of time before this chap, whose name they haven’t even got, is meeting Rolanda in the Hogshead to chat about the merits and demerits of different flying sports and the importance of fair play. They’ll be Puffing along together within the month, Minerva is sure.

“Where might we find Mr Hurdicure?” Minerva asks.

“Headed for the lav, last I saw him,” the jockey answers.

“And where might that be?” Minerva pushes.

He gestures to the woods a few dozen yards away.

“Want to go after him?” Rolanda whispers. “Or are you worried it might put your streak in jeopardy?”

“We can wait.”

For several minutes, Rolanda resumes chatting with the jockey, who says to call him Norm. While Rolanda quizzes him about the difficulties inherent in developing the trust relationship between jockey and hippogriff, Minerva fends off the evil eye from the owner of English Country Home.

Eventually Norm excuses himself, saying he’s got to get ready for the next race. The people milling around them trickle away in his wake, or else take up positions to watch the hippogriffs get corralled and take their positions at the starting gate.

As all this is going on, Minerva catches sight of a figure walking towards the clearing from the wooded thicket not far off.

“That’ll be our man.” She gestures in his direction before heading towards him. Rolanda follows her.

“Mr Hurdicure?” Minerva calls primly as they approach the man. The farther they get from the pen, the darker it is. Behind her, Rolanda illuminates her wand with a wordless *Lumos*.

“Who’s asking?” His tone is short. Whether from the recent loss or because he also thinks they might be the world’s least subtle DMLE agents, Minerva doesn’t know. She and Rolanda fall in step beside him, heading back towards the pen.

“We’re interested in Dutch Courage,” Minerva says, hoping to butter him up a bit.

“Not selling,” he says, but they are close enough now that Minerva can tell he’s interested and trying to play hard ball. Perhaps he wants to unload the creature—perhaps it’s to do with the disqualification.

“We’re very interested in your hippogriff,” Minerva says, unwilling to lie outright. “But we’re concerned about his disqualification tonight. Can you tell me what happened?”

“I don’t have anything to say about that. Some guff—“ He peters off, mumbling curses under his breath. “Who told you I was selling, anyway?” He sounds a bit belligerent now.

Minerva thinks it’s prudent to end the charade before they get his dander up only to let him down. They’re nearly back at the pen, and Minerva tells him, “I’ll level with you, Mr Hurdicure, we’re not buyers. We put money on your hippogriff tonight and we’d like to know why it was disqualified.”

They arrive back at the pens and, perhaps emboldened by proximity to his fellows, Mr Hurdicure raises his voice, crossing his arms obstinately over his chest and saying, “I don’t know, do I? Didn’t disqualify my own griff, did I?”

“I presume not,” Minerva affirms. “But you must know why—“

“Don’t know nothing about it. Those are the breaks, ladies.” Around them, a few of the owners and spectators turn away from the pen to watch.

Minerva stiffens at the way he addresses them, and can feel Rolanda do the same next to her.

“With all due respect, we just want to know why a winning hippogriff can suddenly—”

“Part of playing, isn’t it,” Mr Hurdicure interrupts. “If you’re going to be a big girl’s blouse when you lose a few Galleons, then you shouldn’t be—“

“Excuse me?” Minerva says, trying to keep her baseline fury about sexism from rising dangerously high.

“Girl’s blouse?” Rolanda voice rises but holds firm, as though she’s daring a lippy fourth-year to repeat some fool comment.

A few members of their now-captive audience snicker.

“That’s right,” Mr Hurdicure says, leaning his face close to Rolanda’s.

Minerva puts her hand firmly on one of his shoulders and pushes him backward. “Get out of her face,” she commands.

The idiot leans back in. “You’re going to make me, are you?”

“Mr Hurdicure—” Minerva calls upon her deepest reserves of teacher patience “—I assure you we only want to know—“

“I don’t give a fuck what you want to know, if I’m honest. And you can keep your hands off me. I can see it’s been a while since you had a man, but—“

Guffaws sound around them. Further away, hippogriffs ruffle their feathers, as though impatient to soar into the air.

“Oh, of course,” Rolanda scoffs. “We’re really interested in a great oaf with a losing hippogriff—“

Mr Hurdicure pulls out his wand and casts a Blasting Charm.

Compared to Voldemort’s ranks, though, Mr Hurdicure is child’s play. Minerva casts a silent *Protego* without even drawing her wand.

BANG.

The curse rebounds off of Minerva’s shield and makes contact with the magical confines of the hippogriff pen.

“Who warded this pen?” Minerva says, disgusted by the lack of magical competence as the wards around the pen fail.

No one answers, probably because, as she asks, Mr Hurdicure lunges towards Rolanda and all of the newly-free hippogriffs seize their moment to take to the sky, a number of unprepared jockeys falling to the ground with loud thuds.

Minerva looks from Rolanda, who’s handily dodged Mr Hurdicure, to the jockeys, who are in Circe only knows what state on the ground. Minerva thinks she should check on them, but Rolanda’s dodge causes her to fall into Madam English Country Home from earlier. Already spoiling for a fight, the woman moves to shove Rolanda, but Minerva intervenes, grabbing her arm and shoving her aside. Madam English Country Home falls into a couple of people behind her. Like deck of Exploding Snap that goes off when the pile of cards is thick, soon the whole scene is chaos. All of a sudden, the loudspeakers, which have been silent since they arrived, erupt with music.

“Now?!” Minerva yells incredulously at Rolanda. She hears an answering laugh.

*

“*Expelliarmus!*” Minerva deftly catches the wand sailing through the air towards her.

“Give that back, you old baggage!” screams the oaf who’s just lost his wand.

Minerva ignores him, instead looking around the field. It’s dark out—even darker now than when they’d arrived. The lanterns that previously hung about the pen, illuminating the track, have fallen to the ground. It’s been a wettish autumn so far, and Minerva doesn’t think the grass is dry enough to catch, but she sets to putting the lanterns out with targeted *Aguamenties* anyway. The hippogriffs have landed, and, free from their pens, and from their riders, are on the rampage. On top of it all, incongruously jolly notes—piano and guitar and rowdy percussion all playing together—sound from the loudspeakers. *Hey you with the pretty face, welcome to the human race*

A few yards away, Minerva’s eyes find Rolanda. She’s sitting on Mr Hurdicure’s back, holding one of his arms behind him and using her other hand to plough his face into the grass repeatedly in time with Electric Light Orchestra.

Trusting Rolanda can take care of herself for another moment or two, Minerva casts another wandless and wordless *Protego*, and an invisible shield takes form around her, easily deflecting her disarmed opponent, who seems to have decided that, in the absence of his wand, the next best thing is to charge at Minerva like one of the indignant hippogriffs.

“Whaaaa?” he cries in confusion, as he bounces backwards into the brawl.

Minerva tosses his wand onto the ground and looks to the sky for deliverance from this sorry scene as Jeff Lynne’s synthesised voice calls *Mr Blue Sky!* into the night. Minerva shakes her head and is pleased to note she feels no wayward hair around her face—her industrial strength Hair Holding Charm is doing its job. She lets out a dry, exasperated laugh before heading over to extract Rolanda and get them the hell out of here.

Her birthday had started out with such promise, she thinks. She was warm in bed with Rolanda—with whisky! And cake! Why hadn’t they stayed there? Someone grabs hold of Minerva by the arm and pain floods the newly tattooed area. She calls out in pain.

“Sorry madam—Minerva.” It’s the jockey—Norm. “Might I suggest you leg it? This sort of tussle, it happens around here, you know?”

“You mean this is a regular occurrence?” Minerva says, dodging jinxes as she walks towards Rolanda. Norm follows along, taking three steps for every one of Minerva’s.

“It is what it is.”

“And you like this crowd, do you?” she asks, ducking a rogue rock that some fool has pelted at someone else; she’s probably not even the intended target. The place looks and sounds as though Jeff Lynne is conducting a symphony of bedlam.

Nearly at Rolanda and Mr Hurdicure, Norm answers simply, “I like to fly. I like—Dutch Courage!”

Minerva’s eyes follow Norm’s and she sees two hippogriffs—one must be Dutch Courage—facing off.

At Norm's voice, one of them looks over. Norm whistles and the hippogriff takes flight to join him.

As Minerva reaches both arms around Rolanda's middle and tells her, "We're leaving. To hell with the 63 Galleons," Dutch Courage lands and exchanges a hasty, cursory bow with Norm, who pats his equine raptor. Minerva removes one arm from Rolanda to grab Norm and meets his eyes. He nods. She Apparates them all—herself, Rolanda, Norm, and Dutch Courage—back to Hogsmeade. In an instant, the shrieks, curses, swearing, and cowbell and fire-extinguisher percussion of the clearing are gone.

After the chaos of the clearing, Hogsmeade seems silent as the grave. Minerva releases Norm and backs away in case Apparating is cause for an already-agitated hippogriff to bare its talons, though she doesn't release her arm around Rolanda's middle. "What'd you grab me for?" Rolanda asks. "His ass was grass."

"That is was," Minerva says, kissing her smartly. "And as much as I love it when you give misogynists what's for, I would rather we didn't get slashed by rogue hippogriffs or hit with stray curses."

"Well," Rolanda says putting her own arm around Minerva's waist and pulling them together, "you *are* the boss."

*

Minerva apologises to Norm for the hasty Apparition. "Defensive reflexes, you know? And I really was sobered up," she assures Rolanda.

Norm laughs it all off, as though this is just another night at the track. Rolanda asks if he'll let them apologise properly with a nightcap at the Three Broomsticks, but Minerva coughs out the universal signal for "Absolutely not—it's bedtime" just as Norm diplomatically declines.

"I never drink and fly," he says, bowing before Dutch Courage and mounting his steed after receiving a bow of his own. "I'll take you up on it another time, though. Lovely to meet you both! Happy Birthday!" Norm calls behind him as he and Dutch Courage take to the sky.

*

Minerva and Rolanda cross the Hogwarts grounds and reach their chambers at ten minutes to midnight.

"Well," says Rolanda. "We got to take out our Misogynist Muff wrath out on Mr Hurdicure. We got tattoos. We lost some Galleons. And we made it home, pubes intact."

Minerva bursts out laughing and takes a seat, heavily, on their bed.

"Next year," she says, pulling off one boot after the other as Rolanda does likewise, crouching by their door, "let's just stick with bed, shall we?"

"Pah! Next year? We've got my birthday to celebrate well before then." Rolanda grins and kicks aside her boots before walking to their bed. "Now, let's get a proper look, what do you

say?"

She pulls Minerva's jumper up and over her head gently, slowly, lifting Minerva's arms with it, leaving her in a cotton camisole.

Before Minerva can drop her arms, Rolanda takes hold of her elbow. Her touch is tender around the joint.

"What is Pomona going to say about this?" She laughs at the tattoo under Minerva's bicep.

"Why do you think I got it under my arm? No one's going to see it but you and I."

"What about next time Poppy gives you a check up?" Rolanda points out.

"Poppy's unshockable," Minerva responds, which is true enough.

Rolanda touches the skin around the tattoo and reads aloud: "'Guac City,' though, Min?"

"What other caption would you give a tattoo of an avocado?" Minerva asks, as though Rolanda's is the most dim-witted question she's ever heard.

Rolanda's gaze flicks from the ink avocado to Minerva's eyes. For a moment they stare one another out, but after a moment they are both grinning and then howling together. Rolanda collapses forward onto the bed, pinning Minerva's torso under her own. That makes them laugh harder and soon they are wheezing with exhausted mirth. At some point, they both slip off of the bed and onto the shaggy rug, now laughing silently in that bizarre way that somehow transcends sound.

"It hurts," Rolanda finally manages between gulps of air.

After a few more minutes of collecting themselves only to dissolve again and again into laughter, they finally manage to get their laughter to a controllable level.

"Bed?" Minerva asks, taking Rolanda's hand.

"You get in and warm up the bed. I'll get the scotch and we can have a nightcap."

"I thought scotch was a breakfast beverage?" Minerva calls after her, kicking off her trousers and getting into bed in her pants and camisole.

Rolanda reappears and crosses the room, tossing the bottle onto the bed by Minerva.

"Well then you don't have to have any."

Rolanda disrobes and climbs in after Minerva, lying next to her and reaching for the bottle. Quick as a flash, Minerva's arm reaches out and grabs it first, uncorking it and taking a swig before handing it to Rolanda.

"To you, on your birthday," Rolanda says, tilting the bottle towards Minerva and gulping down a large measure after her night of sobriety. "To guacamole," she adds, gulping down

some more.

Minerva snatches the bottle back and makes her own toast. “To 63 more years, at least, and all with you.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Rolanda says, turning her head to kiss Minerva’s throat and reaching for the bottle.

Across the room, the clock chimes midnight.

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